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JOURNAL

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THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY.

ART. I. *On the Intermixture of Buddhism with Brahmanism in the religion of the Hindus of the Dekkan.* By the REV. J. STEVENSON, D.D.

(Read 21st November, 1840.)

THAT Buddhism prevailed extensively in the Dekkan during the period of its ascendancy in India, is evident, from the imperishable monuments of that religion existing in the celebrated caves of Ellora (Verul), Kárlí, Ajanta, and Salsette (Sáshte). It would give, however, but a very imperfect and limited idea of the influence and extensive ramifications of Buddhism, to suppose that its monuments are confined to places of such celebrity. To speak only of the neighbourhood of Bombay, small caves having inscriptions in the ancient cave character are to be found in the hills near Nasik and Junír. Even at the comparatively unimportant villages of Máhar on the Bánkot river, and Kher, twelve miles distant, there are excavations of a similar kind, which I myself have visited. Some of them still contain a dágoba, and others fragments of stone, belonging to a previously existing place of that kind; and I have no doubt that many similar caves exist throughout the country, though they never have been brought to public notice. When, then, stations of Buddhist priests existed in such places as these, to say the least, their influence in the country around must have been considerable. At the commencement of the controversy between the rival sects, the Buddhists seem to have had the decided superiority. Buddhism is eminently a religion of reason: it rejects all that reason does not comprehend; and makes its constant appeal to (Buddhi) the human intellect, as the supreme judge in religious things. Brahmanism, on the contrary, is a religion of tradition. The Vedas and the Rishis have handed down certain things as

sacred and acceptable to the Deity, and for that reason the Brahman practises them. Thus, for example, the Buddhist declares animal sacrifice criminal, because it is attended with the slaughter of an innocent creature; and the only evasion to which the Brahman can have recourse, in order to defend his ancestors from cruelty, is to maintain that the Rishis restored again to life all the animals they killed in performing their sacrifices. The Buddhist of the present day may not be able to disprove this assertion; but it is plain from the edicts on the pillars at Delhi, Allahabad, &c., lately decyphered by Mr. James Prinsep, that no such miracle was ever, in former days, believed to have taken place; and that the grand advantage that the Buddhists had over their opponents, consisted in their mercy to all living creatures, as contrasted with the bloody rites of the Brahmans.

Those higher views which, as Christians, we are taught to entertain of the nature of the rite of sacrifice, that it was intended to impress men's minds with a sense of their guilt in violating the divine commandments, and to lead them to welcome the atonement to be made by the Author and Finisher of our faith, were unknown to the defenders of Hinduism. To regain, therefore, the influence they had lost at the first, the Brahmans were compelled to modify their system, and cast into the shade, or abolish altogether, those parts of their religion least defensible on the ground of reason. Five of these objectionable things are particularly mentioned in one of their own books, the *Achára Mayukha*, ascribed to Sankara Achárya. They are: 1. The Agni-hotra, *i. e.* the oblation to fire; 2. The killing of cows for sacrifice; 3. *Sanyása*, *i. e.* self-torturing austerities; 4. The use of flesh in the sacrificial feasts to the manes of their ancestors; 5. The marrying the widow of a deceased brother. All these things are declared prohibited in the *Kali-yuga*, by the following *Sloka*.

अग्निहोत्रं गवालंभं सन्यासं प्लवैतृकं ।

देवराक्षसुतोत्पत्तिः कलौ पंच विषज्जेयेत् ॥

It is, however, further added, that Náreda, the author of the prohibition, and the Momus of the Brahmanical Pantheon, was so far won by the intreaties of the Brahmans, as to restore to them the Agni-hotra and *Sanyása*, while the other three still continued under his interdict.

The objection to the Agni-hotra seems to have been the animal oblations made to fire. Thus, for example, at the *Somayága*, one of the greatest of all the ceremonies performed in honour of that

element, the caul of a slain ram forms a part of the offering, and the Bháshya of the Sáma Veda expressly says, that "at each of the three daily sacrifices an animal is to be slain." **त्रिणि सवनानि पशुस्तुभ्यः**¹ How objectionable such a rite must have been in the eyes of the ancient Buddhists, may be conjectured from the ridiculous light in which it is put in the Abhangs of Tuka Rama, a Hindu sage, who flourished in the Dekkan about three hundred years ago. His verses are to the following effect :—

" Beat to death the ram when muzzled,
And offer the Soma with sacred song,"
So they say, but still I'm puzzled,
And half suspect such worship wrong.
Are rites like these tho Deity worthy,
That turn religion topsy-turvy?

The Sanyása, also, as connected with self-torturing rites, was at the first prohibited. In fact, I conjecture the whole of this prohibition to have been of Buddhist origin; and that while, during the Buddhistical ascendancy, other parts of Brahmanism were allowed to be practised, these were absolutely forbidden. Indeed, the other parts of Hinduism are mentioned by the Buddhists with respect, and in some of their books they speak as if they believed in the existence and power of Indra, called by them Sakko (S. Sakra), and other Brahmanical gods. However this may be, with the Brahmanical ascendancy the Agni-hotra and Sanyása assumed their former importance in the Hindu system; but the sacrificing of cows, and eating flesh, in performing the rites to the *manes*, could no longer maintain their ground. The edicts² of Asoko, issuing from his royal residence on the Ganges, and set up in various places from Girnar in Gujarat, to Cuttack in Orissa, strictly forbidding the putting to death of any animal, had sunk too deep into the minds of men to permit these bloody rites to resume the same place that they had done before in the Brahmanical system. The Hindus, indeed, of the present day, will hardly admit that the cow was ever sacrificed by their ancestors. But the works handed down to us by their ancient writers, prove this point to demonstration.

There is a story, not far from the commencement of the Matsya Purána, detailing at great length the history of seven brothers, who on their father's death, threw themselves on the hospitality of Garga Rishi, and who, in lack of other materials, killed and ate their

¹ Part 1. Prapáthaka i. Das. vi. 2.

² Issued in the twenty-seventh year of his reign; and as he ascended the throne, B.C. 325, the date of the edicts is B.C. 290.—Note by the Editor.

patron's cow, as a sacrifice to the manes of their sire. For this act of piety on their part, they were so favoured as to pass to the highest state of bliss,—final emancipation, after being born other five times; and after every succeeding birth, to recollect all the transactions of their lives in their past transmigrations. It is declared in the same Purána, that the feast to the manes of ancestors should consist of thirteen kinds of flesh. Among these are enumerated mutton, venison, &c., and several kinds of fowl and fish; but in my copy the enumeration amounted only to eleven, and a blank was left. Did this blank imply that the Englishman's favourite dish was wanting, and that the hungry manes were looking out for a good round of beef? In the Sutrás annexed to the Rig-Veda, the first hymn of the third Adhyáya of the first Astaka is ordered to be chanted at the sacrifice of a cow, गोसवे.

True it is that among the ancient Rishis there were not wanting men who spoke slightly of animal sacrifice, when they could not expressly condemn it. Thus Godha, in the Sáma Veda, says, "O ye gods, we use no sacrificial stake, we slay no victim, we worship entirely by the repetition of sacred verses¹." But the sentiment of Angirasa, that "He who offers animal sacrifice is like heaven itself, for conferring happiness²," seems decidedly to have prevailed among the Brahmans till after the origin of Buddhism. Brahmanism, as first established, or afterwards revived, in the Maratha country, is universally by the natives traced up to Sankara Achárya, whom they deem an avatar of Siva, raised up to put down the Buddhists. He is generally supposed to have flourished at Kolapur at the commencement of the ninth century of the Christian era. Previously to that period, then, it is admitted that Buddhism generally prevailed throughout the country; his constitutions are always appealed to as directing modern practice. To him, then, we are naturally led as the person who introduced the modifications into Brahmanism which we have mentioned, and which were rendered necessary, from the long prevalence of the other religion. Sankara Achárya thus was an eclectic, who formed a new system, in which he endeavoured to combine the excellencies of other religions with the Brahmanical. Genuine Buddhism, it is true, now no longer exists in Western and Central India; but the sect of the Jains, who are but a branch derived from the parent stem, or themselves the stem from which Buddhism sprung, are numerous, and maintain the chief peculiarities of the system, both in doctrine and practice, denying the existence of

¹ Part I. Prapáthaka II. Das. ix. 2.

² Rik. Mandala I. Anuvaka VII. Sákta i. 15.

an intelligent First Cause, adoring deified saints, having a priesthood practising celibacy, and thinking it sinful to take the life of any animal for any cause.

To my mind, however, the most singular result of the influence of Buddhism upon Brahmanism, is the transformation of two Buddhist, or more probably Jain devotees, a male and a female, into a Hindu god and goddess. Yet when it is considered that the great heresiarch himself has been conveniently transformed into an avatāra of Vishnu, sent down to propagate error on earth, and prevent men from coming to heaven in numbers to incommode the gods, we ought not to be astonished if two Buddhist saints should rise to the rank of Hindu deities. Such I conceive to be the origin of the worship of Vithoba and Rakhami at Pandharpur, and other places in the Dekkan. The reasons for this opinion are the following.

1st. The want of suitable costume in the images as originally carved, in this agreeing exactly with the images the Jains at present worship, and disagreeing with all others adored by the Hindus. The Hindu votaries of Vithoba and his wife endeavour, it is true, to identify them with Krishna and Rukmini; but the images of Krishna, and of every other Hindu god and goddess, are in the respect I have mentioned, quite different from those of Vithoba and Rakhami. The Hindus, with all their faults, (and these neither few nor light,) had always sense of propriety enough to carve their images, so as to represent the gods to the eye, arrayed in a way not to give offence to modesty. And so much does the same feeling prevail, in regard to the objects of worship at Pandharpur, that cloth is annually purchased and brought from the bazar, to furnish a dhota and pagota¹ for Vithoba, and a lugadi² for Rakhami. The same thing is done in all parts of the country where their worship is established. Rather a laughable lawsuit arose, about seven years ago, in a village near Poonah, out of the circumstance of Vithoba's requiring every year a new suit of clothes. The family of the original image-dresser having become numerous, and having separated into two different families with separate interests, it was agreed between them, that the one branch should perform the worship, and receive all the offerings, while the perquisite of the other should be the god's cast clothes, which, of course, at the end of the year should have been nearly as good as new. The cunning image-dresser, however, whenever there was a marriage or a feast, took the liberty to borrow the dress of his patron god over-night, restoring it to him

¹ A man's lower garment.

² A turban.

³ A web of cloth covering the whole body of a female.

again early next morning, so that at the end of the year the clothes were much the worse for wear. The other party complained to the judge, who dismissed the case as not within his jurisdiction.

2nd. There is a strong party among the Brahmans, at the present day, who deny the claims of Vithoba to a place in the Hindu Pantheon, and who roundly assert that the great temple at Pandharpur, where he is principally worshipped, once belonged to the Jains, and was bought from them by a party of Brahmans, who pay quit rent to the descendants of the original possessor to this day. It is difficult to conceive how such a story should have originated, unless it be true; and supposing the Jain religion previously to have prevailed extensively, and Pandharpur to have been reckoned a place of sanctity in former times, it is easy to see how the Brahman inhabitants might still wish to maintain the credit of the place, when under their own influence, after the establishment of the Brahmanical ascendancy, and worship the Jain saints as a Hindu god and goddess.

A certain Sástrí, one of the party opposed to Vithoba, went so far during the reign of Mahadeva Ráo Peshwa, as to endeavour to move the government to interfere, and proscribe a worship sanctioned neither by Veda nor Purána. The worldly wisdom, however, of Nana Phadnis (Furnavese) came to the rescue of the god, and foiled the science and zeal of the Sástrí. He intimated to his master that it was no affair of his to oppose the claims of a god, who yearly mustered tens of thousands of devoted followers.

3rd. The festivals of Vithoba seem to have no relations to those of the Hindu god Krishna, with whom his followers wish to identify him, but on the other hand, correspond in a remarkable manner with the holy seasons of the Buddhists.

The birthday of Krishna is on a different day of the moon, and in a different month from any of the festivals of Vithoba. But the two greatest days at Pandharpur happen, the one just four days before the commencement, and the other just four days before the completion, of the Buddhist *Wasso*, or season of sacred rest, which continues from the full moon of Ashádha to that of Kartika¹. To illustrate this agreement, we must refer to a strange idea that has crept in among the Hindus, that Vishnu, the Preserver of the Universe, sleeps during four months in the year, and these, too, those of the rainy season, when the grain that is to supply nourishment for man and beast is sown, and chiefly matured. It seems a most unaccountable whim even for a Hindu to set the preserving god

¹ Corresponding to our July and November.

asleep, when he should be all awake, to vivify the seed, and mature the fruits of the earth. It is from Buddhism alone that we can derive any consistent explanation of this anomaly.

During the Wasso, or sacred season of religious rest, the Buddhist priests employ their time in holy meditation, and thus aid to the utmost of their power the husbandman in procuring food for the support of the world. Buddha is identified with Vishnu, and sleep in the Sanskrit language is identified with the intense devotion of the sage. Hence the sleep of Vishnu the Preserver is nothing more than the devotional rest of the priest, who, by his meritorious works, sustains the universe. Whether the change from the 15th to the 11th day of the month Ashádha, was intended in an average number of years to bring the sleep of Vishnu nearer to the summer solstice, or for what other reason, I am not able to determine.

The day when the moon passes from the month Pausya to Mágha, is also kept as a great day at Pandharpur, and called the Vela new moon. Fifteen days earlier at the preceding full moon, is the anniversary of Buddha's visiting Ceylon, and the beginning of the Tibetan year. In the time of Buddha, there was a great festival on that day at Uruveláya, (Buddha Gaya in Behar). It is a well known fact that in the Dekkan all the months begin fifteen days later than they do in Hindustan; but whether this may have been the cause of a departure from the day on which the festival was originally celebrated or not, I cannot say. The minute particulars regarding these festivals I have not the means of investigating, from the want of the calendars of the Buddhist nations around us. It is the general relation of time, in the only three annual festivals celebrated at Pandharpur, with Buddhist holy seasons, to which I would direct attention.

4th. Within the precincts of the temple at Pandharpur, there is no distinction of caste. Vethál, the proper name of the god, means "He who receives the ignorant;" at least, so his votaries interpret it. This is another feature of Buddhism directly opposed to the Brahmanical religion.

While reflecting on this subject, it has occurred to me that many of the arguments I have used will apply also to Jagannátha in Orissa, and that the worship of that god, also, is derived from Buddhism. Since :—

1st. There is no distinction of caste within the holy territory of Jagannáth.

2nd. Buddhism anciently prevailed in the province of Orissa, as appears from the Buddhist remains still existing.

3rd. The Ratha Jātra just immediately preceding the Sayana Ekādasi, or season of sacred rest, is probably the remains of a triumphal entry, with which the sages were welcomed on returning from their peregrinations, to hold the Wasso.

4th. The image of Jagannātha is said, and universally believed by his votaries, to contain the bones of Krishna. Now every one conversant with the opinions of the Hindus, knows that it forms no part of the Brahmanical religion to collect and adore dead men's bones. The doctrine of the Gita on this subject is, that at death the elements separate, the spirit returns to its parent spirit, the air to air, and the earth to earth. On the other hand, it is a most meritorious act among the Buddhists to collect and preserve the relics of departed saints, and the places that contain them are esteemed peculiarly holy.

Lest the idea of the Hindus symbolizing with Buddhism should appear strange to any one, I may, just before concluding, advert for a moment to the fact, that in the Dekkan, Hindus often present offerings to Mahomedan peers, and worship at their tombs. In the city and camp of Poonah, a few years ago, while I was residing there, there could not be less than two or three hundred Hindus, who annually engaged in celebrating the festival of Hassan and Hossein. They or their fathers encouraged, no doubt, by the Mullahs, had made vows to that effect, which they religiously observed. By these vows, sometimes a man binds his children for several generations after him, and the performance of that ceremony becomes a part of the family religion. Hindus make the image of a superb tomb, carry it about the streets, and cast it into the waters, just as is done by Mahomedans.

I by no means, however, think that I have exhausted this subject. Much light may be thrown upon it in other parts of India, and more may be known, I suspect, even here, than I have been able to learn. It seems to me a subject of considerable interest, and one which, if prosecuted in the different provinces of the empire, may throw much light on the history of religious opinion in India, and aid in disabusing the world of the vulgar notion, so little creditable to the genius of the Hindus, that all the millions of Hindustan have continued to think, from the earliest ages, on religious subjects, exactly as their fathers did, without any struggle to break the chains in which the Brahmanical priesthood had bound up their mental energies.
